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Turner Quiet On Verifying SALT Terms

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CIA Director Stansfield Turner, saying he wanted to maintain his credibility as an objective source of foreign intelligence, declined to say whether his agency can "verify" Soviet compliance with a strategic arms treaty.

Moreover, at a gathering of the Overseas Writers Club yesterday, Turner said the loss of monitoring stations in Iran lowered his confidence in the United States' ability to verify Soviet compliance.

He declined to say what the CIA was doing to compensate for loss of the Iranian sites, on the ground such discussion would disclose intelligence methods.

Turner distinguished between "monitoring" and "verification," saying the CIA's task was to monitor Soviet activity in relation to each provision of the proposed treaty.

But it is for policy-makers, he said, to verify compliance — to assess whether changes discovered by the CIA violate the treaty.

"IF I GET into saying my opinion of these factors, my interpretation of the treaty, the cost-benefit to the country, the risks and benefits of having this treaty as opposed to having none, then the objectivity of my position . . . will be questioned," Turner said, adding:

"I should be the impartial SOB who is able to stand up and say, 'With these instruments of intelligence collection and these techniques of analysis, senator, I can do this for you on checking provision 17B of the treaty.'"

Authoritative reports in the past week suggest that final agreement on a strategic arms pact is near.

The adequacy of U.S. verification techniques, such as satellite cameras and electronic eavesdropping, will be a major factor affecting senators' votes on ratification of the treaty.

Turner, a retired Navy admiral, passed up an opportunity to reply to attacks on the draft treaty made Wednesday by a group of former military officials including Lt. Gen. Daniel O. Graham, a former director of the Defense Intelligence Agency.

"THE DAMAGE that has been done to our country already by the improper revelations on this SALT question is serious. . .," Turner said. "We must absolutely keep the details of monitoring and verification out of the media. It's unraveling, it will unravel like a ball of string if we don't."

"There is no single panacea to verifying and monitoring any particular provision of the treaty. It always comes as a conglomeration of several techniques."

Turner denied there had been an "intelligence failure" by U.S. agencies, which failed to anticipate the shah's demise in Iran.

The CIA saw discontent in Iran's political, religious, economic and cultural spheres, he said. "But we didn't see that a 78-year-old exiled cleric (Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini) would be the force that would coalesce all of these areas of discontent to the point where they got out of control," Turner said.

"Nor did any of us anticipate that when the chips were down, the shah, with a strong police power, would not be able to exercise that power to control the dissidents."

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